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Walt Disney Productions

Mineral King...

The village will be the focal point in Walt Disney Productions' master plan for the development of California's Mineral King area into a family recreation center. The plan includes facilities for skiing, hiking, and camping.

... to benefit both man and nature

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The United States Forest Service gave its approval recently to the master plan of Walt Disney Productions for the development of Mineral King as a year-round recreational area. It was the culmination of many years of discussion, controversy, and study on the part of skiers, conservationists, would-be developers, and government agencies concerning the future of a small, exquisite mountain valley hidden away at the southern end of California's great Sierra Nevada range.

The alpine terrain of Mineral King is located in an area of about 20 square miles in the Sequoia National Forest. The valley floor, about two miles in length, is situated along the headwaters of the East Fork of the Kaweah River, at altitudes of 7,500 to 8,000 feet. It is surrounded by rugged peaks up to 12,400 feet, with numerous cirques and hanging valleys. There are 20 lakes in the area.

Mineral King has been accessible by a narrow, winding road, approximately 30 miles long, which is closed by snow in winter. In summer the region has been enjoyed by campers, hikers, and fishermen, and is used as a base for trips into the back country, often using the facilities of the local pack station.

Excellent skiing

Skiers have known for a long time that the valley held excellent skiing on long snow slopes emanating from several huge bowls at the far end, facing north. But few have skied there. Access in winter demands a major road-building effort, which, in turn, involves many other factors, such as a plan acceptable to the U.S. Forest Service for the development of Mineral King.

Three years ago the Forest Service awarded a permit to the Disney organization, chosen from six applicants, to make a study of the area and come up with a plan that would meet with approval. The years of intensive study that followed included every aspect of the problem. Always in mind were the two principal guidelines set up by Walt Disney in connection with the project:

(1) Plan village facilities primarily for families, but provide also for all age levels, income groups, and for various athletic abilities.

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(2) Protect Mineral King's exceptional scenic values.

During the years of study, Disney teams have lived in Mineral King, gathering extensive data regarding winds, stream flow, snow depths, snow-drifting patterns, and other matters pertinent to the planning. Several observers attended the Forest Service Avalanche School at Alta, Utah. Experts on ecology have made studies. Experts such as Andre Roch, head of the Avalanche Institute at Davos, Switzerland, have been brought in to ski and study the area. Teams have visited almost all the major Alpine winter sports areas, including 22 major ski resorts in five European countries. Additional trips were made to inspect the latest in gondolas, funiculars, and trams before making decisions as to what would be best for Mineral King.

Attention has been focused on utilizing fully the immense winter sports potential of the area, and on generating sufficient economic benefits for the state to justify its expense in building the necessary two-lane all-weather highway. This latter project involves also the cooperation of the National Park Service, inasmuch as 8.5 miles of the road will cross Sequoia National Park. Assurance is required that none of the scenic values of the park be lost and that no sequoia trees be damaged or destroyed.

Keep automobiles out

Highway construction is slated to begin in the summer of 1969, with completion scheduled for 1971, at which time the Disney organization will begin construction. Opening is planned for the season 1973-74, with overnight accommodations for 1,500 guests. A five-year plan calls for an investment of \$35 million by 1978.

One of the most important decisions was to keep automobiles out of the valley, thus avoiding air pollution, congestion, and the irritation of conflict between pedestrian and automobile. Cars will be stored snow-free in a sub-level 8-story structure at the reception center at the entrance to the valley. From there a Swiss-style electrically powered cog-assist railway will take the guest to the

village, unless he prefers to walk. Skiers may take a gondola directly to the ski area, which will be served by 10 chair lifts and gondolas in 1973-74, increasing to 22 lifts in 1978.

The village is to be a picturesque cluster, conforming to the natural contours of the land. It will be somewhat like the Alpine villages which have grown through the centuries in accordance with the ways of the people, and so fit easily into the landscape. The pedestrian will be king. Disney said: "If people want to walk in a certain place, make a path there. The people come first."

Although its ski potential has provided the major impetus for the inevitable development of Mineral King, it is expected that summer use will exceed winter use. Summer activities will be mainly fishing, equestrian sports, hiking, and picnicking. Camping will be in a forested area outside the valley proper. It is emphasized that Mineral King is not to be an entertainment center, like Disneyland. It is to be a recreational center, with no artificial aids other than those related to nature. Disney said: "This is not an entertainment place—it is a recreational facility designed to take advantage and make accessible to the public the beautiful natural country up there."

The quality and thoroughness of the approach seem to assure that Disney's last dream will come true—"We can bring man and nature together for the benefit of both."

Sequoia National Forest